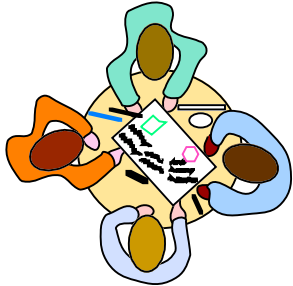


Collaborative Learning

what do we mean?

Collaboration is about creating something greater between us than would have been achieved separately.

Cooperating is a lesser idea, about actions being adjusted so that each person achieves their individual goals [in a classroom: "Pass the ruler please"], whereas collaboration is about actions being adjusted in order to achieve a shared goal ["let's build it like this"].



what's collaboration to do with learning?

"You learn more [when working with others] because if you explain to people what to do, you say things that you wouldn't say to yourself, really. So you learn things that you wouldn't know if you were just doing it by yourself"
[Annie, 10 years, interview with Caroline Lodge]

One of the key elements in collaborative learning is the promotion of dialogue. Dialogue in which learners explain to each other enhances understanding.

As learners become more adept in talking themselves through problems and contexts, their "outer speech" develops, and so does their "inner speech", giving greater power of self-direction.

how do we go about it in a classroom?

It's not just a matter of putting pupils in groups! Three major dimensions need attention:

1. Design of the Task

- it must not be "decomposable", (i.e. one person could do it alone)
- it must be high level (i.e. not a "right answer" task)
- it must foster interdependence (so that each participant can bring some-thing similar and something different)

2. The Type of Interaction



Learners may need prompts and support to develop their capacities:

- to focus on the thinking ("what do you think of my idea?")
- to focus on helping each other ("I'm confused about ...")
- to handle the emotional aspects ("I feel ... when you ...")

Such capacities are effectively developed through reviewing what works best, rather than moralising.

Interaction can be built in pairs, for example through "reciprocal teaching" where pairs read a text and discuss their reading in relation to given prompts:

- question
- clarify
- summarise
- predict

3. The Structure of Participants

Collaboration is often built on a structure which starts in pairs, develops to small groups and then engages the whole class. Groups are most often comprised on a mixed basis: they then can reduce status differences and use diversity productively (more than is usually predicted).



Jigsaw Classroom

The core idea is to divide an area of enquiry into different sections, each one of which is allocated to a sub-group of the class. These sub-groups become expert in their section, and then the groups are recomposed with contributor(s) from each section in the (now) "jigsaw" group. At this point the big picture is created.

Examples:

- five "causes" of World War II
- the properties of six rocks
- different characters in Fairy Tales
- reading parts of a story together

In collaborative classrooms, small groups are often engaged in producing a product which supports the learning of other groups, and the whole class may publish a product which communicates the fruits of its learning beyond the boundaries.

Chris Watkins



what holds us back?

- "I couldn't delegate to THEM!" (the voice of derision)
- "they don't have the skills of collaboration" (the voice of deficit)
- others will think it's too noisy (the voice of fear)
- the caretaker wouldn't like me moving the tables (the voice of compliance)
- "high flyers" might be held back (a belief in maintaining difference rather than embracing diversity)
- there's no collaboration amongst the staff in this school!
- forgetting (or not knowing) that research demonstrates that collaborative classrooms are associated with:
 - Improved learning and achievement
 - Improved social and communication skills
 - Improved engagement and responsibility
 - Improved relationships